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European Diplomacy in the Spanish Crisis

BY VERA MICHELES DEAN

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WHEN Germany and Italy, on November 18, recognized the Rebel junta at Burgos as the legitimate government of Spain, they revived the danger of European conflict which the Franco-British policy of non-intervention had sought to avert. This recognition—coming at a moment when the Rebels were encountering stubborn resistance on the part of Madrid's defenders, strengthened by the last-minute arrival of Soviet arms and war material—created the impression that the Fascist powers intended to assure the victory of General Franco and block the establishment of a Left government in Catalonia—even at the risk of collision with the Soviet Union.

Spain's civil war¹ crystallized the European struggle between fascism and communism which had hitherto lacked a common battleground. This struggle assumed the character of religious war, with the adherents of one doctrine fanatically attacking those of the other, while the hesitant forces of moderate opinion received no quarter from either side. The mounting tide of ideological conflict burst the bounds of national frontiers, sweeping aside former dissensions between nations and obliterating familiar landmarks of the European political scene.

In this maelstrom of impassioned and uncompromising doctrines it became increasingly difficult for any government, no matter what its ultimate intentions, to steer a moderate course or distinguish between policies calculated to insure peace and those calculated to provoke war. Immediately following the outbreak of civil strife in Spain, French Socialists and Communists, in unison with the Soviet press, accused Portugal, Germany and Italy of having encouraged, if not actually inspired, the military rebellion, and of furnishing arms to General Franco.

Portugal, which in 1932 under the dictatorship of Premier Salazar had adopted a corpora-

tive system closely modeled on that of Italy, did not disguise its sympathy for the Spanish Rebels or its fear that, should the Left triumph in Spain, it might seek to plant communism on Portuguese soil. Nor did the German and Italian press conceal the fact that the two Fascist powers were entirely on the side of the Rebels. In France and the Soviet Union it was believed that Hitler intended to encircle France with a ring of Fascist states—thus preventing the Blum government from aiding the U.S.S.R. in case of a Nazi thrust into Eastern Europe—and to compromise communism in British eyes by linking the activities of the Spanish Popular Front with those of the Third International. Italy, it was alleged, welcomed this opportunity to secure a foothold in Spanish Morocco and obtain the collaboration of a Spanish Fascist régime which might challenge British control of the western Mediterranean. Persistent rumors asserted that, in exchange for war material furnished largely on credit, General Franco had promised Hitler and Mussolini bases in Morocco and the Balearic Islands—although these rumors were categorically denied by the Rebel leader.

While the Soviet press and a section of the French Popular Front denounced the Franco rebellion as a carefully planned move in a Fascist drive against communism, Germany and Italy accused France and the U.S.S.R. of fomenting Communist agitation in Spain and of rendering material aid to the Madrid government, invariably described as "Red" or "Bolshevik." Germany, especially, saw in the Spanish crisis a practical demonstration of the woes which would befall Europe unless it heeded the Nazi summons—"Europe, awake!"—and girded itself under Hitler's leadership for a crusade against bolshevism.

Until the dust of battle has cleared away it would be obviously impossible to prove or refute these charges and countercharges on the basis of unassailable evidence. It might be pointed out,

1. The internal situation in Spain will be discussed in a forthcoming issue of *Foreign Policy Reports*.

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however, that Germany and Italy were in a better position than the Soviet Union—both because of industrial development and geographic proximity—to intervene effectively in the Spanish crisis. While the Rebels were strengthened from the outset by the arrival of foreign planes, tanks and other war material, such aid as the Spanish Communists may have received from the Third International or the Soviet government in the early days of civil war did not noticeably bolster Loyalist defenses. Moreover, while the Soviet government regarded non-intervention as unjust to the Loyalists, it promptly accepted the non-intervention accord, in the hope that France and Britain would insist on its strict observance;² and by executing old guard Bolsheviks accused of fostering Trotzkyism in the U.S.S.R. created the impression that it had dissociated itself from the cause of world revolution.

Caught between the cross-fires of actual or potential intervention in Spain by fascism and communism, Britain and France sought to follow a middle course, and resisted every attempt to range them irrevocably on one side or the other. Some observers had expected that the Baldwin government—dominated by conservative elements which had displayed serious concern for imperial communications during the Italo-Ethiopian crisis—would oppose the rise of a military-Fascist group in Spain which might collaborate with Mussolini in defying British domination of the Mediterranean. The Conservatives, however, apparently feared communism more than fascism; while public opinion, irrespective of party lines, was reluctant to make a clear-cut choice between fascism and communism, which seemed equally hostile to democracy. Having burned its fingers in the Ethiopian affair, the Baldwin government wanted to avoid further entanglements, and preferred to follow a cautious if inglorious policy of “safety first” and “peace at any price” until it had completed its rearmament program. The British press—with the exception of the sensational Rothermere newspapers which capitalized every “Red atrocity” story, and Catholic organs for the most part hostile to the Loyalists—displayed on the whole a balanced attitude, and strove to present both sides of a confused and highly controversial issue.³ The Labour party and the trade unions criticized the government’s procrastination and expressed warm sympathy for the Loyalist cause. Both the party and the unions, however, regretfully reached the conclusion

that non-intervention was the lesser of two evils, provided it was scrupulously observed by all European states.⁴

BLUM’S NON-INTERVENTION POLICY

Far more difficult and complex were the problems faced by the Blum government, which rested on the support of Radical Socialists, Socialists and Communists, aligned in the Popular Front. The cabinet was from the first divided between the Radical Socialists, who advocated strict neutrality and avoidance of all incidents which might involve France in a European conflict, and the Socialists, who believed that their fate depended on the outcome of the Spanish struggle, and wanted to give all possible aid to the Madrid government. Outside the cabinet M. Blum was subjected to pressure from both Right and Left. The parties of the Right openly supported the Spanish Rebels, described as “patriots” and “nationalists,” and denounced expressions of sympathy for the Loyalists as subservience to Moscow; while the Communists daily berated the government for its failure to furnish the Madrid government with arms and war material, summoned the Popular Front to attack fascism at home and abroad, and threatened to organize stay-in strikes of a political character if the government refused to yield. M. Blum’s position was further complicated by the fact that his personal sympathies were on the side of the Spanish Loyalists, and by realization that the victory of General Franco—who could have no sympathy for the French Popular Front—might eventually menace France’s Pyrenean frontier and its communications with Morocco.⁵ Any hope M. Blum may have cherished at first of organizing support for the Madrid government was soon dispelled by Britain’s determination to avoid continental entanglements⁶—which might have left France alone to face the retaliation of Fascist powers. Undismayed by the clash of conflicting opinions, M. Blum succeeded in resisting pressure from both Right and Left, and retained control of a situation which for weeks threatened to reach the point of explosion. Rising above personal sympathies and

4. Cf. report of the conference of the Parliamentary Labour party, the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, and the National Executive of the Labour party, at Transport House in London on August 28, 1936. *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph* (London), August 29, 1936. Also “Labour Speaks,” *Daily Herald* (London), August 29, 1936; and “Spain,” *ibid.*, August 26, 1936.

5. Pierre Dominique, “Les Conservateurs contre la Nation,” *L’Europe Nouvelle*, August 8, 1936, p. 799.

6. Martin, “Spain and British Public Opinion,” cited, p. 578; “Fair Play,” *The New Statesman and Nation*, October 17, 1936, p. 576; “France under M. Blum: Foreign Policy,” *The Times*, October 24, 1936.

2. “‘Primenenie’ Soglasheniya o Nevmeshatelstve v Ispanskye Dyela” (“Application” of the Accord for Non-Intervention in Spanish Affairs), *Izvestia*, October 18, 1936.

3. Kingsley Martin, “Spain and British Public Opinion,” *The Political Quarterly*, October-December 1936, p. 573.

party politics, the Premier assured his followers that only a policy of non-intervention—detrimental as it would be to the Loyalist cause—could prevent Germany and Italy from coming openly to the assistance of the Rebels and precipitating a European conflict.⁷⁻⁸

Formulation of M. Blum's non-intervention policy was made particularly arduous by the difficulty of applying the accepted rules of international law to the Spanish situation. Under these rules it would apparently have been legal for foreign governments to permit arms shipments both to the Rebels and to the legitimate government at Madrid. No foreign government, however, could have legally permitted supplying of the Rebels while withholding arms from the constituted authorities. Had a foreign government itself furnished the Rebels with arms, it would have committed a hostile act against the Madrid régime, which could subsequently have claimed compensation. Once an actual state of belligerency had been recognized to exist, all governments would have been obliged to treat both sides with strict impartiality. They could then have permitted both parties to be supplied with arms, or withheld war material from both.⁹

What the Blum government feared was that, if France gave the legally constituted government in Madrid the aid it had the right to receive under international law, Germany and Italy would recognize the Rebels as Spain's legitimate government, and that civil war might then be transformed into an international struggle. It sought to deprive the Fascist powers of a pretext for recognition of the Rebels by voluntarily relinquishing France's right to furnish the Madrid government with arms and war material.¹⁰ By proposing a general non-intervention agreement, M. Blum hoped to prevent the supply of arms to either side without raising the issue of recognition. The effectiveness of this agreement obviously depended on the promptness with which it was accepted and the scrupulousness with which it was observed by all European states.

France's determination to prevent intervention in Spain was crystallized on July 31 by the disclosure that two days earlier Italy had allowed the departure of 21 military planes destined for General Franco's forces in Melilla and Ceuta, Spanish

Morocco. When three of these machines crashed in French North Africa, the French authorities discovered that until July 20 they had belonged to the Italian air force; that they carried full war equipment; and that although the pilots and crews had been furnished with civilian passports, they were in reality Italian military aviators.

Following this incident, which aroused the indignation of the Socialists and Communists and strengthened their demand for aid to the Madrid government, the Blum cabinet announced on August 1 that it had decided to address a pressing appeal to the principal interested powers "for the rapid adoption and the rigorous fulfilment" of "common rules of non-intervention." It added that, until that time, the French government—acting under a precautionary measure adopted on July 25—had refused to authorize the export of arms to Spain, including delivery on contracts made before the outbreak of civil war; in view of the fact, however, that war materials were now reaching the Rebels from abroad it reserved its liberty of action pending conclusion of an international non-intervention agreement.¹¹ On the same day the French Ambassadors to Britain and Italy—the two principal Mediterranean powers—were instructed to approach the British and Italian foreign offices, with a view to reaching an agreement which would then enable the three states to address a collective appeal for non-intervention to other countries.¹²

The British government, on August 4, agreed "in principle" to the French non-intervention proposal, but suggested that negotiations should be extended to include all powers which might conceivably intervene in the Spanish crisis.¹³ On the same day the Quai d'Orsay communicated its proposal to Germany, Portugal, the Soviet Union and other interested countries. The German Foreign Minister, Baron von Neurath, promptly informed the French Ambassador in Berlin that the Reich "would see no difficulty" in entering negotiations for the drafting of non-intervention rules, provided these rules were also applied to the Soviet Union.¹⁴ On August 5 the U.S.S.R. declared that it accepted the French proposal, but insisted that Portugal should participate in the negotiations and that the assistance rendered the Rebels by "certain

7-8. Cf. speech of Léon Blum at the meeting organized by the Socialist Federation of the Seine at Luna Park, September 6, 1936. *Le Populaire* (Paris), September 7, 1936.

9. Charles Cheney Hyde, *International Law, Chiefly as Interpreted and Applied by the United States* (Boston, Little, Brown, 1922, 2 volumes), Vol. I, p. 77.

10. Pierre Brossolette, "La Neutralité et la Paix," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, August 15, 1936, p. 819.

11. For text of communiqué, cf. *Le Temps* (Paris), August 3, 1936. Some neutral observers have asserted that, before the non-intervention agreement came into force, the Madrid government received considerable aid from France, notably 40 airplanes.

12. "La Politique de Non-Intervention en Espagne," *ibid.*, August 3, 1936.

13. Cf. speech of Mr. Eden, British Foreign Secretary, in the House of Commons on October 29, 1936. *The Times*, October 30, 1936.

14. *New York Times*, August 5, 1936.

states" be immediately stopped.¹⁵ Meanwhile, workers throughout the Soviet Union were invited by the Central Council of Trade Unions to contribute one half of one per cent of their monthly wages to a fund destined for the Loyalists.

On August 6 Italy, whose first reaction had been reported as unfavorable, agreed in principle to the French proposal, subject to three reservations couched in the form of questions. Count Ciano, Italian Foreign Minister, asked the French Ambassador in Rome whether moral solidarity with the Madrid government—notably public collections like the Soviet levy, enrolment of volunteers and expressions of sympathy in the press—did not constitute a "noisy and dangerous form of intervention"; whether the proposed non-intervention accord would be binding on private individuals as well as governments; and what concrete measures were envisaged by France to insure strict observance of non-intervention pledges.^{15a} Italy's reservation regarding the press was thought to imply that, if the democratic governments of France and Britain failed to muzzle public opinion, the Fascist dictatorships might use this as a pretext to block or at least delay a non-intervention accord.

Having received more or less explicitly favorable replies from Britain, Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Czechoslovakia, the French cabinet, on August 5 and 6, drafted a non-intervention accord which it submitted to the interested powers.¹⁶ This accord proposed a ban on the export of all war material to Spain, including warships and commercial, as well as military, planes—this ban to cover orders placed before the outbreak of civil war; and exchange of information by the signatories regarding measures adopted to fulfill their non-intervention pledges. On August 8, following a stormy four-hour meeting of the Blum cabinet, in the course of which the Radical Socialists stood fast for non-intervention, while the Socialists urged aid for Madrid, the government issued a communiqué declaring that, pending the outcome of non-intervention negotiations, it would continue its embargo on arms and war material to Spain, including commercial planes ordered from private firms, which had been excepted from the July 25 embargo.¹⁷ A government spokesman subsequently explained that France had adopted a policy of "conditional" neutrality, which it reserved

the right to alter should other countries continue to aid the Rebels.¹⁸

Aware that delay in international negotiations facilitated the supply of arms and war material to the Rebels, France and Britain made joint diplomatic representations in Berlin, Rome and Lisbon to hasten conclusion of a non-intervention accord. The need for this accord was emphasized by reports that the German battleship *Deutschland*—whose commander had called on General Franco in Ceuta, Spanish Morocco, on August 3—had landed bombs in that port; that bombing planes were being transported to Spain in a German liner; and that 21 airplanes had arrived in Spanish Morocco from Ortobello, Italy. These reports were denied in Berlin, and over the weekend of August 8 Dr. Bielfeldt, German chargé d'affaires in London, gave the British Foreign Office categorical assurances that no war material of any kind had been sent to the Rebels from Germany either by the government or by private individuals; that no such assistance would be rendered in the future; and that German warships in Spanish waters had been instructed to refrain from any action which might be interpreted as indicating sympathy with, or support of, the Rebels.¹⁹

PROTESTS OF MADRID GOVERNMENT

These assurances gave little comfort to the Madrid government, barred from securing arms and war material in France. In a note of August 10 to M. Delbos, French Foreign Minister, the Spanish Ambassador in Paris M. de Albornoz vigorously protested against the French communiqué of August 8 and the proposed non-intervention accord.²⁰ He reminded M. Delbos that the military rebellion in Spain did not constitute a state of war, and that suspension of arms exports to the Madrid government at the very moment when it needed them most to re-establish order on its own territory, far from conforming to the principle of non-intervention, constituted "a very effective intervention" in Spain's internal affairs. As a result, the Spanish crisis might last much longer than if the Madrid government had not been deprived of access to war material it could have normally purchased in France. The Spanish government, he added, recognized that a non-intervention accord might serve to ward off international complications, and was ready to collaborate.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Daily Telegraph*, August 10, 1936.

20. *La "Non Intervention" dans les Affaires d'Espagne: Documents Publiés par le Gouvernement de la République Espagnole* (White Book distributed by the Spanish delegation to the League of Nations at Geneva during the League Assembly, on October 1, 1936), p. 3.

15. *Ibid.*, August 6, 1936; *Daily Telegraph*, August 6, 1936.

15a. *Daily Telegraph*, August 7, 1936.

16. *Le Temps*, August 8, 1936.

17. *The Times*, August 10, 1936; *New York Times*, August 16, 1936.

rate in its application, provided that the accord went promptly into force and that its strict observance was assured by effective guarantees. He pointed out, however, that even brief prolongation of a situation in which certain states—notably France—had already prohibited arms exports to the Spanish government, while others, which should participate in the non-intervention accord, retained full liberty of action, would be fraught with grave consequences.

The fears expressed by M. de Albornoz were borne out by the grudging response accorded the French draft agreement, which at that time had been accepted only by Britain, Belgium, Poland and the Soviet Union. Negotiations had struck a snag on August 10, when Portugal demanded assurances on three points: non-intervention by the Soviet Union; respect for the international zone of Tangier by both sides to the Spanish civil war; and protection of the Portuguese régime by France and Britain in case of a Communist victory in Spain.²¹ Italy, on the same day, intimated that it might temporarily set aside its three reservations of August 6,²² but conversations in Rome marked time pending Mussolini's return from a holiday in the country. Meanwhile Germany delayed its reply, demanding that the Madrid government should first give satisfaction for the alleged murder of four German nationals in Barcelona and the seizure of six Lufthansa planes used to transport German refugees from Madrid to Alicante. Following protests by the German chargé d'affaires in Madrid five of these planes had been returned, but the sixth, which had made a forced landing between Madrid and Alicante on August 9, remained in the hands of the Loyalists, its crew under arrest.²³ No express denial could be obtained in Berlin of reports that 25 German planes had landed at Cadiz on August 11, and that a number of Lufthansa planes, originally in Barcelona for rescue purposes, had found their way—through a commercial transaction effected in Lisbon—into the hands of insurgents in Spanish Morocco. Nor was European tension eased by the revelation that the British government, which was urging non-intervention in Rome and Berlin, professed itself powerless under existing laws to prevent the departure of British commercial airplanes for Spain.²⁴

On August 15 M. de Albornoz, in a note to

M. Delbos, pointed out that a week had elapsed since submission of the French draft accord, and that, while France continued to ban arms exports to Spain, other countries retained full liberty of action, thus jeopardizing the effectiveness of the French non-intervention policy.²⁵ M. Delbos, in reply, assured the Spanish Ambassador that France was making every effort to hasten non-intervention negotiations, and that its ban on arms exports was an indispensable prerequisite to the conclusion of a general accord.²⁶

In a fresh effort to check intervention, Britain and France exchanged identical notes in Paris on August 15.²⁷ Both countries undertook to prohibit the export, direct or indirect, of arms, munitions, war material, planes and warships to Spain and the Spanish zone in Morocco—this undertaking to go into effect as soon as Germany, Italy, Portugal and the Soviet Union had joined a general non-intervention agreement.

Apparently unmoved by this display of Franco-British solidarity, Germany and Italy continued to procrastinate. On August 17 the Hitler government, notified of the contents of the Franco-British notes, declared it was ready to undertake similar pledges, provided that the Spanish government released the Lufthansa plane still detained in Madrid and that other arms-producing states signed the non-intervention accord—without making it clear whether Germany would insist on the participation of non-European powers, notably the United States, or would accept an agreement limited to European countries.²⁸⁻²⁹

Fearing the consequences of further delay, the British government attempted to set an example for other countries on August 19, when it unilaterally imposed an absolute ban on the export to Spain of all arms and war material, including commercial planes, whose continued departure had been severely criticized by the Labor and Liberal press.³⁰ On the same day hopes for a non-intervention accord suffered a serious setback when Germany lodged a sharp protest against the action of the Spanish government in the case of the German merchant steamer *Kamerun*. This steamer, according to German sources, was proceeding to Cadiz—a port in the hands of the Rebels—to evacuate German refugees, when it was ordered by two Loyalist war vessels to stop on the high seas, on suspicion of carrying arms to the Rebels. When

21. *Daily Telegraph*, August 11, 1936; *New York Times*, August 11, 1936.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *New York Times*, August 13, 1936. The crew of the German plane were released on August 16.

24. Commercial planes did not come under the provisions of the British Arms Export Prohibition Order of 1931, and the government had no statutory control over their departure by air.

25. *Spanish White Book*, p. 5.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

27. For texts, cf. *L'Europe Nouvelle*, September 26, 1936, Supplement, p. I.

28-29. *New York Times*, August 18, 1936.

30. *New York Times*, August 20, 1936.

the *Kamerun* refused to stop, the Loyalist vessels fired shots across its bow and subjected it to visit and search, contrary to the accepted rules of international law. Admiral Carls, commander-in-chief of the German naval forces in Spanish waters, warned the chief of the Spanish government navy that this action was "a crime against the right of free navigation on the high seas,"³¹ and that German war vessels had been ordered "to answer every unjustified use of force . . . with force"; while the German press described the incident as an act of "Red piracy" and denounced the "alliance" between Madrid and Moscow.

While Europe was still weighing the consequences of the *Kamerun* incident, Portugal—which had been assured that France and Britain would protect its territory against Communist invasion—accepted the French non-intervention proposal "in principle" on August 21. The Portuguese government, however, formally condemned the "barbarous methods" of the "communist and anarchist militia" in Spain, and reserved its freedom of action on a number of points, including defense "against all régimes of social subversion which might establish themselves in Spain, should the necessity of safeguarding Western civilization call for such defense." It declared that enrolment of volunteers and public collection of funds were contrary to the spirit of non-intervention and that, should one of the signatories of the proposed accord permit such measures within its territory, Portugal would feel released from the non-intervention pledge.³²

On the same day, following pressing representations by the French Ambassador and the British chargé d'affaires in Rome, the Italian government answered the French draft agreement note of August 6. In a pledge identical with that embodied in the Franco-British notes of August 15, Italy undertook to prohibit direct or indirect export of arms, munitions, war material, warships and planes to Spain and its possessions, and to inform other interested states of the measures it would adopt to fulfill this pledge, as soon as France, Germany, Britain, Portugal and the Soviet Union had adhered to the French proposal.³³ It pointed out, however, that the signatories of the proposed accord should abstain from "indirect intervention" by prohibiting public collection of funds and enrolment of volunteers for either side to the Spanish conflict; and declared it was essential that the non-intervention accord should be joined by all European arms-manufacturing states.

Germany followed suit on August 24, when the French Ambassador in Berlin was informed that the Hitler government had decided to give immediate effect to the terms of the draft accord, although negotiations with Madrid regarding restitution of the Lufthansa plane had not reached a satisfactory conclusion.³⁴ The favorable impression produced by this German move in London and Paris was offset on the same day by the announcement that the Reich was increasing the term of military service from one to two years as a measure of defense against communism.

FORMATION OF NON-INTERVENTION COMMITTEE

Having at last secured the replies of the great powers—as well as the assent of Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, the Irish Free State, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Rumania, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Yugoslavia³⁵—the French government, on August 26, invited all states concerned to form an international committee to supervise application of the non-intervention accord and to discuss other forms of non-intervention.³⁶ Britain, the Soviet Union and Italy promptly accepted this invitation, but Portugal and Germany once more found cause for delay. Meanwhile, the Madrid government reported that 24 German airplanes had landed in Vigo for the use of the Rebels, and it was rumored that shipments of arms and airplanes from both Germany and Italy were reaching the Rebels through Portugal. The German press countered these reports—which it did not officially deny—by declaring that Loyalist forces at Irún were receiving clandestine assistance across the French border, and that Loyalist soldiers who had taken refuge in France were permitted to return to Barcelona with arms in their possession instead of being disarmed and interned. On September 2, when the European atmosphere was once more charged with electricity, Portugal, yielding to British pressure, accepted France's invitation with certain qualifications,³⁷ and on September 5, following strong British representations in Berlin, Germany agreed to participate in the work of the international committee.³⁸

This committee, composed of the diplomatic representatives in Britain of 27 European states,

34. *Ibid.*, p. II.

35. For texts of these replies, cf. *L'Europe Nouvelle*, September 26, 1936, Supplement.

36. *New York Times*, August 27, 1936; *The Times*, August 27, 1936.

37. *The Times*, September 3, 1936.

38. *New York Times*, September 6, 1936.

31. *Ibid.*, August 21, 1936.

32. For text, cf. *L'Europe Nouvelle*, September 20, 1936, Supplement, pp. VI-VII.

33. For text of Italian note, cf. *ibid.*, p. IV.

met for the first time in London on September 9 under the presidency of W. S. Morrison, Financial Secretary of the British Treasury. The Baldwin government regarded the organization of the committee—in which Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia had agreed to sit at the same table and discuss measures for the prevention of war—as a good augury for the Locarno conference, on which it continued to pin its hopes for European appeasement.³⁹ The committee, however, was handicapped from the start by Portugal's last-minute refusal to be represented until it had received further information regarding the scope of the committee's powers, and by the failure of the German and Italian representatives to produce copies of the non-intervention measures adopted by their governments.⁴⁰ After a perfunctory discussion, the committee adjourned on September 9 to await complete documentation.

While the non-intervention committee marked time, Portugal intensified its aid to the Spanish Rebels.⁴¹ This aid was given fresh impetus on September 8 when a short-lived revolt occurred on two Portuguese warships in Lisbon whose crews, according to the government, had hoped to turn their ships over to the Madrid authorities. Foreign correspondents reported that stocks of gasoline purchased by Portuguese citizens from the United States and Britain were being shipped to the Rebels; that Rebel headquarters in Lisbon were purchasing war material and enlisting soldiers for General Franco's forces; and that the Portuguese authorities were sending Spanish Loyalists who crossed the frontier back to Rebel-controlled territory in Spain, where they faced certain death.⁴²

On September 15 the Spanish Foreign Minister, Julio Alvarez del Vayo, addressed a note to all signatories of the non-intervention accord, protesting against continued intervention by Germany, Italy and Portugal on the side of the Rebels.⁴³ He contended that the military rebellion, "supported only by the feudal vestiges of society" and deprived of all popular support, would have been crushed "in the embryo" by the immense majority of the

Spanish people if the Rebels had not received armed aid from Germany and Italy. By tolerating Fascist intervention in Spain on behalf of the Rebels, he said, the European powers were creating an extremely dangerous precedent for the future, which would permit states addicted to the use of force to impose with impunity their ideology and political concepts on other countries by fomenting civil war and furnishing arms to the insurgents. On the same day Señor del Vayo protested to Germany, Italy and Portugal against specific instances of aid to the Rebels, some of which had occurred before the Fascist powers had accepted the non-intervention accord.⁴⁴

Anticipating that his charges against the Fascist powers might be hushed up by the non-intervention committee, Señor del Vayo indicated that he would publicly divulge them in the Assembly of the League of Nations, which opened on September 21.⁴⁵ The Assembly's steering bureau, however, dissuaded him from following this course.⁴⁶ It feared that public revelation of Madrid's charges might precipitate the international crisis non-intervention was intended to avert, and insisted that discussion in the Assembly should be limited to questions on the agenda, which did not include the Spanish civil war. In his speech to the Assembly on September 25 del Vayo consequently refrained from specific accusations, merely stating that the Rebels had received, "beyond any possibility of doubt, both moral and material assistance from states whose political régime coincided with that to which the Rebels are wedded," and that there was daily proof, "sealed with our own blood, that the Rebels are using in action immense stocks of foreign war material which they did not possess when the rebellion broke out."⁴⁷ Señor del Vayo had meanwhile transmitted his government's charges to the League Secretariat,⁴⁸ expecting they would be published and communicated to League states in the form of a League document. M. Avenol, Secretary-General of the League, declined to do this, on the ground that the Spanish question was not on the League's agenda.⁴⁹ Balked once more, del Vayo, on September 30, issued a Spanish

39. *Ibid.*, September 9, 1936.

40. *Ibid.*, September 10, 1936. For texts of legislative and other measures taken by European governments to give effect to the non-intervention agreement, cf. Great Britain, *International Committee for the Application of the Agreement Regarding Non-Intervention in Spain*, Spain No. 2 (1936) (London, H. M. Stationery Office, 1936), Cmd. 5300.

41. Frank L. Kluckhohn, *New York Times*, September 14 and 21, 1936.

42. Regarding alleged treatment of Spanish Loyalists by Portuguese authorities, cf. note addressed by Señor del Vayo, Spanish Foreign Minister, to the Portuguese government on September 15, 1936. *Spanish White Book*, cited, p. 13.

43. *Spanish White Book*, cited, p. 8.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-13.

45. Speech by del Vayo at a luncheon of the Association of Journalists Accredited to the League of Nations, September 20, 1936. *New York Herald Tribune*, September 21, 1936.

46. "L'Assemblée au Travail," *Journal des Nations* (Geneva), September 25, 1936.

47. League of Nations, *Verbatim Record of the Seventeenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations*, Sixth Plenary Meeting, September 25, 1936, pp. 5 *et seq.*

48. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

49. *New York Times*, September 29 and 30, 1936; *The Times*, October 2, 1936.

White Book⁵⁰ containing, among other documents, the notes he had addressed on September 15 to Germany, Italy and Portugal, with material supporting his allegations.⁵¹

On September 22 it had been reported that the non-intervention committee, stirred by del Vayo's protests, would urge Portugal to fulfill its obligations.⁵² When the committee reconvened on September 28, however, it avoided discussion of Portugal's aid to the Rebels and, at the suggestion of Lord Plymouth, acting chairman, adopted a set of elaborate rules to deal with alleged violations of the non-intervention agreement. Every complaint made by a government regarding violation of the agreement was to be addressed in writing to the committee. The chairman was to communicate the complaint to the representative of the state against which it was directed, with a request that that state should supply the committee "with such explanations as are necessary to establish the facts." On receipt of the reply, the committee was to take such steps "as might appear proper" in each case to ascertain the facts of alleged violation.⁵³ These rules received the assent of all the states on the committee, including Portugal, which was represented at this session for the first time.

Alarmed by the dilatoriness of the committee and the steady advance of the Rebels on Madrid, the Soviet government, in a note of October 6 to Lord Plymouth, charged that Portugal was violating the non-intervention agreement and proposed that a committee of investigation be sent to the Spanish-Portuguese frontier to ascertain the facts.⁵⁴ Before this note had been published or considered by the committee, the Soviet representative, M. Kagan, delivered a second note⁵⁵ in which he listed the intervention charges contained in the Spanish White Book together with testimony secured by an unofficial British committee of inquiry, and expressed the fear that "the situation created by repeated violation of the London non-intervention pact makes the agreement non-operative." The Soviet government, said the note, could not consent to the conversion of the non-intervention agreement into "a screen for concealing military assistance to the Rebels against the legal government by some participants in the agreement," and was compelled to declare that "if violation is not halted immediately it will soon consider itself free from any obligation resulting from the agreement."

This second note had the effect of a bombshell. It was at first feared in London and Paris that the Soviet government would withdraw from the non-intervention accord and ship arms to the Loyalists, thus provoking a head-on collision between fascism and communism, and irrevocably splitting Europe into two camps. Britain and France took the view that even a faulty non-intervention agreement was better than unrestrained competition to aid the two sides to the Spanish conflict; and on October 9, in Paris, M. Blum assured Mr. Eden, British Foreign Secretary, that France would steadfastly maintain its policy of non-intervention.⁵⁶

CHARGES AND COUNTERCHARGES

On the same day the non-intervention committee held a stormy seven-hour session. Lord Plymouth stated that Britain had received from the Spanish government certain documents—the Spanish White Book—charging incidents which, if substantiated, would constitute breaches of the non-intervention agreement, and on October 6 had communicated these documents to the committee on its own responsibility.⁵⁷ Prince von Bismarck, German chargé d'affaires, and Signor Grandi, Italian Ambassador to London, categorically denied the charges made by the Spanish White Book and the Soviet government, and accused the U.S.S.R. of indulging in provocative political manoeuvres to conceal shipment of war material to the Loyalists.⁵⁸ The official communiqué issued at the close of the meeting stated there had been general agreement "that it was imperative in the general interest that complaints which had been received should be subjected to the most searching examination and that this examination should be carried through with the greatest possible speed."⁵⁹ The Soviet charges were consequently submitted in writing to Germany, Italy and Portugal.

The Soviet press voiced disappointment with the "inconclusive" action of the committee and called for armed assistance to the Spanish government.⁶⁰ Shiploads of food and clothing were dispatched from Soviet ports to the Loyalist forces. On October 12 M. Kagan, in a note to Lord Plymouth, requested immediate convocation of the committee to consider Soviet proposals, which included blockade of Portuguese ports by French and British vessels, and strict supervision of the Spanish-Portuguese frontier to prevent the dispatch of war

50. Cf. p. 228.

51. *New York Times*, September 30 and October 1, 1936.

52. *New York Herald Tribune*, September 23, 1936.

53. *The Times*, September 29, 1936.

54. For text, cf. *New York Times*, October 9, 1936.

55. For text, cf. *ibid.*, October 8, 1936.

56. *Ibid.*, October 10, 1936.

57. Communiqué issued by the non-intervention committee on October 9. For text, cf. *New York Times*, October 10, 1936.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*, October 12, 1936.

material to the Rebels.⁶¹ Lord Plymouth declined on October 15 to summon the committee, pointing out that the Soviet charges of October 7 had already been forwarded to Germany, Italy and Portugal, and that the October 12 note contained no fresh evidence of intervention.⁶² The Soviet government began to fear that its charges and proposals would be stifled in the coils of procedure.

On October 15 Joseph Stalin, Secretary-General of the Communist party, broke his habitual silence by sending a message to the Central Committee of the Spanish Communist party, in which he declared: "The workers of the Soviet Union are only fulfilling their duty by rendering all possible assistance to the revolutionary masses of Spain. They realize that the liberation of Spain from the yoke of Fascist reactionaries is not the private concern of Spaniards, but the concern of all advanced and progressive humanity. Brotherly greeting!"⁶³ Stalin's reference to performance of Soviet "duty" was interpreted abroad as an admission that the Soviet Union was already shipping arms and war material to the Madrid authorities, but this was denied by a Soviet government spokesman, who asserted that aid had been limited to shipment of food and clothing. Meanwhile, practically identical resolutions demanding "effective aid" for the Loyalists unless the Fascist powers were restrained from intervention were adopted by workers' groups throughout the Soviet Union.⁶⁴ The Soviet press denounced Lord Plymouth's decision as contrary to common sense; declared that the international committee was hypocritically marking time in the hope that Rebel victory would relieve it of further responsibility for observance of non-intervention;⁶⁵ and contended that the Soviet Union should now lead the masses of the world in supporting Spain's struggle against fascism.⁶⁶ This press campaign caused some foreign observers to believe that the Soviet government, yielding to the pressure of Dimitrov, secretary-general of the Third International, had decided to abandon Litvinov's policy of collaboration with capitalist democracies, and to support the cause of world revolution. It seems more probable that the U.S.S.R., fearing the establishment of Fascist dictatorship in Spain would prevent France from assisting its Soviet ally against

German attack, was seeking to arouse France and Britain to the danger of Rebel victory.

When President Azaña of Spain, alarmed by the rapid advance of the Rebels, transferred some of the government offices from Madrid to Barcelona on October 22, Moscow indicated that it would continue to recognize the Loyalists as Spain's legitimate government even if the Rebels occupied Madrid.⁶⁷ This decision was emphasized by the appointment of Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko—a military expert who had organized the resistance of Petrograd workers against White forces in 1917—as Soviet Consul-General in Barcelona.⁶⁸ His appointment was given added significance by reports that the Rebels might attack Barcelona from Majorca, in the Balearic Islands, where troops were said to have been armed with Italian assistance.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, the Spanish Ambassador in London, in a note of October 20 to Lord Plymouth, charged that a large number of tanks and 100 flame-throwers had been landed at Cadiz from Italy on October 15, and that a German ship had delivered a cargo of munitions—principally anti-aircraft guns—at Algeciras.⁷⁰ These charges were corroborated by foreign correspondents in Spain, who reported that the rapid progress made by the Rebels during the latter part of October was due to the arrival of 40 whippet tanks from Italy.⁷¹ The British government, confronted with these new charges, pressed Berlin, Rome and Lisbon for replies to the Soviet accusations of October 7, and summoned a meeting of the international committee for October 23. It was daily expected in London that the Soviet Union would withdraw from the non-intervention accord and ship arms and war material to Madrid.

On October 22, however, the Soviet Union—possibly yielding to diplomatic representations by London, Paris and Prague—receded from the threatening position it had assumed a few days earlier.⁷² Torn between the desire to collaborate with the Western democracies in a possible conflict with Germany, and the urge to display its solidarity with Spanish workers, the U.S.S.R. apparently decided, for the time being, to take no step which might irrevocably alienate the sympathies of France and Britain. Yet when the committee reconvened on October 23 M. Maisky, Soviet Ambassador in London, presented a note⁷³ in which the Soviet government declared that the non-

61. For text of M. Kagan's note, cf. *The Times*, October 15, 1936.

62. For text of Lord Plymouth's note to M. Kagan, cf. *ibid.*, October 16, 1936.

63. For text, cf. *Izvestia*, October 16, 1936.

64. *New York Times*, October 16, 1936.

65. "'Primenenie' Soglasheniya o Nevmeshatel'v v Ispanskye Dyela," cited.

66. *Izvestia*, in an editorial of October 17, 1936, referred to Stalin as "beloved leader of the world proletariat."

67. *New York Times*, October 24 and 25, 1936.

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*, October 21, 1936.

71. *Ibid.*, October 23, 1936.

72. *Ibid.*, October 23, 1936.

73. For text, cf. *ibid.*, October 24, 1936.

intervention agreement was being "systematically violated by several participants," and that Portugal "has been converted into a main base of supply for the Rebels, while the legal government of Spain has been boycotted and deprived of the chance to purchase arms" abroad. The agreement had thus become "a simple torn-up scrap of paper" and had "ceased to exist in fact." The U.S.S.R. saw only one issue from this ambiguous situation—to restore the right of the Madrid government to purchase armaments abroad, and the right of European states to sell war material to the Loyalists. In conclusion, the Soviet government announced that it could not consider itself bound "by the non-intervention agreement to any greater extent than the remaining participants"—a statement first interpreted as a threat of immediate withdrawal. Subsequent discussion, however, disclosed that the Soviet representative was not yet ready to withdraw from the committee.

At the October 23 meeting of the committee the German government submitted a note in which it categorically denied the Soviet charges of October 7, and instead accused the Soviet Union of violating the non-intervention agreement.⁷⁴ Germany charged, among other things, that 60 anti-aircraft guns of Soviet origin had arrived in Madrid from Barcelona on September 12; that the Soviet steamer *Komsomol* had landed 50 tanks and 94 men at Cartagena on October 16; and that the Soviet vessels *Neva* and *Kuban* had delivered arms and munitions at Alicante on September 25 and October 4 respectively. In the course of the ensuing discussion, Lord Plymouth expressed the view that the German note "dealt satisfactorily with the complaints raised."⁷⁵ On the same day the British government, in a note addressed to the committee, offered to produce evidence of four specific violations of the non-intervention agreement—three committed by the Soviet Union and one by Italy.⁷⁶

While a sub-committee of the international committee was debating these various charges and countercharges, Portugal on October 23 broke off diplomatic relations with the Madrid government by a note addressed to the Spanish Ambassador in Lisbon.⁷⁷ In a 21-page memorandum delivered to the committee on the same day, Armindo Monteiro, Portuguese Foreign Minister, denied Soviet charges of intervention by Portugal, and contended that the Third International, with the support of

the Spanish Popular Front, had plotted to instigate Communist revolution in Portugal, to provoke a Spanish-Portuguese conflict and to establish communism throughout the Iberian Peninsula.⁷⁸

Germany and Italy were not far behind Portugal in openly declaring their sympathies for the Rebels. The Italo-German accord reached on October 25⁷⁹ provided for joint defense of European civilization against communism, and declared that General Franco's régime commanded the support of the Spanish people "in the larger part of the national area," thus opening the way for recognition of the Rebels. At the same time the Fascist powers sought to reassure Britain and France by stating that they intended to respect Spain's territorial and colonial integrity.

On October 28—after Portugal had threatened to withdraw "at any moment" on the ground that Britain had violated the London committee's rules by presenting del Vayo's charges—the committee exonerated Italy and Portugal of the charges brought against them on October 7 by the Soviet government. In a sweeping statement⁸⁰—from which M. Maisky, Soviet Ambassador in London, alone dissented—the committee declared that it had "received no proof" of breaches of the non-intervention agreement by Italy and Portugal. At this meeting M. Maisky offered an explanation of the Soviet note of October 23, regarded by the committee as obscure. The Soviet Union, he said, was of the opinion that, until effective control had been established over the supply of arms to the Rebels, "those governments who consider supplying the legitimate Spanish government as conforming to international law, international order and international justice, are morally entitled not to consider themselves more bound by the agreement than those governments who supply the rebels in contravention of the agreement."⁸¹ On the same day the Spanish embassy in Paris charged that Italian troops and armaments, including 112 bombers, had been landed in Majorca to aid a Rebel attack on Barcelona;⁸² and on October 29 the Loyalists, heartened by the arrival in Madrid of foreign tanks and airplanes, launched a vigorous counter-offensive against the Rebels.⁸³

78. For text of this memorandum, cf. *Diario de Noticias*, October 30, 1936.

79. For text of statement by Count Ciano, Italian Foreign Minister, summarizing the accord, cf. *The Times*, October 26, 1936.

80. For text, cf. *ibid.*, October 29, 1936.

81. For text of Soviet statement, cf. *New York Herald Tribune*, October 29, 1936.

82. *New York Times*, October 29, 1936.

83. *Ibid.*, October 30, 1936.

74. For text, cf. *New York Herald Tribune*, October 23, 1936.

75. Official statement regarding seventh meeting of Non-Intervention Committee. *The Times*, October 24, 1936.

76. *New York Times*, October 25, 1936.

77. For text of note breaking off diplomatic relations, cf. *Diario de Noticias* (Lisbon), October 27, 1936.

The British Labour party and Trades Union Council, which had hitherto acquiesced in the government's non-intervention policy as the lesser of two evils, demanded on October 28 that Britain take the lead in restoring to the Loyalists the right to purchase arms abroad.⁸⁴ Prime Minister Baldwin, however, told Parliament the following day that, while some breaches of the non-intervention agreement had occurred on both sides, they were not of sufficient importance to cause a change in Britain's policy.⁸⁵ Foreign Minister Eden denied that non-intervention had benefited the Rebels, and asserted that neither the government nor the non-intervention committee had any information to support Soviet charges against Portugal⁸⁶—although neutral observers in Lisbon had offered detailed evidence of Portuguese aid to the Rebels.⁸⁷ On November 12, following an outburst by Signor Grandi, who accused Stalin of interfering in the Spanish civil war, the non-intervention committee acquitted the Soviet government of three Italian charges of intervention.

CONCLUSION

The policy of non-intervention sponsored by France and Britain was designed to prevent the European powers from openly aiding Rebels and Loyalists in Spain in accordance with their political preferences. Such aid, it was feared, would have irrevocably split Europe into two rival blocs—Fascist and Communist—neither of which enjoyed the whole-hearted sympathy of the Western democracies. In practice non-intervention took the form of intervention in Spanish affairs by depriving the Madrid government of its acknowledged right to purchase arms abroad and, according to many observers, prolonged a peculiarly bitter civil war.

France and Britain have sought to justify non-intervention on the ground that it benefited the Rebels less than the unhampered assistance they might otherwise have secured from Fascist powers; that unrestricted shipments of arms from Germany and Italy would have outmatched Loyalist purchases in Britain, France and the U.S.S.R.; and that the non-intervention agreement, with all its loopholes, prevented war from spreading beyond the confines of Spain. These justifications rest on three principal assumptions: that, in the absence of a non-intervention agreement, the Rebels would have secured greater quantities of war material than the Fascist powers were able to supply under

cover of non-intervention—a proposition which remains open to debate; that France and Britain, geographically as close to Spain as Germany and Italy, were less well equipped to furnish arms than the two dictatorships—a dangerous confession of weakness on the part of the democracies; and that, without an international agreement, Germany and Italy might have created grave danger of European conflict—an assumption as difficult to prove or disprove as Britain's conviction in 1935 that oil sanctions against Italy would have involved Europe in war.

Granted, however, that non-intervention was the lesser of two evils, it is asked why Britain and France, despite Soviet protests, did not insist on strict fulfilment of the agreement, which appears to have been repeatedly violated on both sides. In some quarters it has been argued that the Baldwin government, hostile to communism, purposely overlooked violations by Germany, Italy and Portugal and obliged France to follow the same course by threatening to withhold British aid in case of a Franco-German clash over Spain. It seems more probable that, as in the Ethiopian crisis, the two Western democracies were so dominated by the desire for peace that, rather than risk collision with Hitler and Mussolini, they preferred to tolerate clandestine Fascist aid to the Rebels, which in turn encouraged Soviet aid to the Loyalists. This temporizing policy, far from satisfying the aspirations of the Fascist dictatorships, merely strengthened their belief that the democracies are either too weak or too weary of war to fight except when invaded, and will place no obstacles in the path of aggression.

Would the democracies, by resisting the encroachments of dictatorships, precipitate another world war? Some observers believe that in Europe's highly explosive condition the democracies should avoid all action which might create international incidents susceptible of provoking war. Others contend that there is less danger of war if the democracies take a determined stand against aggression—whether direct as in Ethiopia or indirect as in Spain—than if they persist in paying any price, no matter how unreasonable, which the dictators may demand for the maintenance of peace. In their opinion continued truckling to the threats of potential aggressors may temporarily avert conflict. But by retreating on every issue the democracies fail to remedy the international maladjustments of which the Ethiopian and Spanish crises are outward symptoms; and meanwhile increase the probability that their concessions will secure not peace but a precarious truce, subject to further saber-rattling by the dictators.

84. *Ibid.*, October 29, 1936.

85. *The Times*, October 30, 1936.

86. *New York Times*, October 30, 1936.

87. Frank L. Kluckhohn, *ibid.*, October 30, 1936.